

EFFECTIVENESS

Air Force Leaders Defy Congress's A-10 Mandates

BY DAN GRAZIER

The A-10 Warthog is the most effective, robust, combat-proven close air support aircraft the world has ever seen. A-10 pilots have saved hundreds of lives over the past 30 years. The aircraft is famous for being one of the most survivable in history, able to take multiple hits and still bring the pilot safely home. That is why members of Congress have taken decisive action to preserve the A-10 at least five times since 2014 by adding provisions in the National Defense

Authorization Act (NDAA) that either specifically prohibit the Air Force from retiring aircraft or that increase funding to keep the fleet flying.

The United States doesn't have a replacement that can do the job, so without it the United States risks effectiveness and troops' lives. But Air Force leaders see things differently. They are often more interested in operating faster long-range aircraft on missions led by themselves and have repeatedly decided to rid themselves of an aircraft that principally benefits other services — and they've done this by strictly following

the letter of the law but at the same time defying Congress's directions by essentially sabotaging the fleet in an attempt to render it useless.

The Project On Government Oversight recently obtained a copy of a March 31, 2022, briefing delivered by Pam Lee, the A-10 system program manager at Hill Air Force Base, which clearly shows that Air Force leaders understood full well the wishes of Congress and the American people, but that they pressed forward with their plans to retire the fleet anyway.

The brief, a Technology Acquisition and Sustainment Review, details how

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Air Force leaders starved the A-10 fleet of needed upgrades to include new wings and an updated computer. They also took maintenance resources away from the fleet causing a massive backlog of repair work. The fleet is by no means beyond redemption, but the briefing makes it clear that Congress needs to do more than to just save aircraft from the boneyard. The fleet needs resources to counter years of Air Force sabotage.

At the same time Air Force leaders were starving the fleet of resources, they simultaneously deployed squadrons overseas multiple times. This served to accelerate the fleet's deterioration, helping Air Force leaders make their case that the A-10 should be retired because of its poor condition. By doing so, in an ironic twist, Air Force leaders actually made the case for the A-10's continued relevance by showing how effectively it operated in Syria. A-10s have also been sent back to Europe in recent years as a show of force following Russian aggression in Crimea, and even demonstrated their ability to operate from abandoned highways in Estonia.

It's no secret that most of the Air Force brass has never liked the A-10. It is the only aircraft designed from the start to perform the close air support mission. Air Force leaders generally prefer fast, high-flying aircraft capable of bombing targets far behind enemy lines in the mistaken belief that doing so can win wars without troops fighting on the ground. One hundred years of military history have shown that military forces are much more effective when working in close cooperation. The A-10, flown by pilots dedicated to the close air support mission, was built to fill this role.

DEMOLITION BY NEGLECT

When the owner of a building wants to demolish the structure to build something new but is prevented from doing so by zoning regulations or preservation laws, a strategy some owners use is to simply stop maintaining the structure and allow it to decay to the point where tearing down the structure becomes the only viable option left. The briefing shows Air Force leaders have chosen this course of action with the A-10 fleet, since Congress has correctly thwarted their retirement efforts.

In perhaps the clearest statement possible in a government document, the full effects of the Air Force's campaign against the A-10 are laid bare in the slide's conclusion: "[The Air Force] resourced A-10 to divest yet flew it like an enduring fleet, rapidly accelerating decline toward today's hollowing fleet."

The program isn't hollow because it can't do the mission. It's hollow because there's a mission for the A-10, but the Air Force just chose to neglect it despite being told not to by Congress.

The briefing includes a clear acknowledgement that Air Force leaders understood Congress's intent regarding the A-10 fleet. It speaks to the five full or partial A-10 divestitures proposed by the Air Force, which were "all unsuccessful." Air Force leaders attempted to retire the entire A-10 fleet in the 2015, 2016, and 2017 budget cycles. They attempted two partial retirements in 2021 and 2022. Congress intervened in each case.

The briefing also clearly shows that Air Force leaders had already made up their minds about the A-10's future before Congress had a chance to weigh in on the matter by saying, "decisions ahead of FY15 [President's

Budget] devastated fleet” before listing several challenges that are currently hobbling the program.

The A-10 production ended nearly 40 years ago, so the fleet is aging. Despite that and the Air Force’s efforts to hobble the fleet, the A-10 still outperforms many newer aircraft in key performance metrics. The A-10 fleet has a higher mission capable rate (72.54%) than the F-16C (71.53%) and far higher than the F-22 (50.81%).

One of the biggest challenges from a structural standpoint is the aircraft’s wings. The entire fleet of 281 A-10s should have received new wings by now, since the need for them had been identified years ago. Air Force leaders awarded the Boeing Corporation a \$2 billion contract to build new wings for 242 A-10s in 2007. One of the decisions made by Air Force leaders prior to the 2015 budget cycle canceled the re-winging effort. Air Force leaders allowed the contract with Boeing to lapse in 2016 after only 171 wing sets had been delivered. The Air Force awarded Boeing with a second contract in 2019 to build new wings for the remaining aircraft in the fleet, but deliveries are not keeping up with demand. The briefing shows that, across both contracts, only 173 new wing sets have been delivered so far.

Air Force leaders have also restricted investments into needed upgrades for the fleet. The prime example is the aircraft’s computer, called the Central Interface Control Unit (CICU) which manages the A-10’s avionics, graphics, and communications. This shortens the “kill-chain,” making it easier for the pilot to gather targeting information from the ground controller, place sensors on the target, and then launch and track the weapon. Development on the cur-

rent unit began in 2005, and Air Force leaders have refused to spend any funds since at least 2015 to upgrade the system. An A-10 is not allowed to fly without a functioning CICU. The briefing shows that the computer is the most needed replacement component in the fleet.

The A-10’s software, called Operational Flight Program, has also become the victim of neglect. When Air Force leaders decided in the years before 2015 to retire the fleet, they put all aspects of the program in “sunset” status, meaning they would not invest any resources for upgrades. That in turn placed the software into sustainment status. When Congress prevented retirements, it took three years just to restore funding to normal levels. The software should be upgraded at least every other year,

The aircraft can be replaced. The institutional knowledge and the attack pilot’s culture of dedication to true combined arms would take a generation to recreate.

so the upgrading process has fallen behind. The briefing shows that it would take at least seven years to field up-to-date software.

All of this neglect has had a devastating effect on the fleet. More than half of the 281 A-10s in service today could not deploy now if they were called to do so. According to a source inside the A-10 community, Air Force instructions sent to squadrons as part of their deployment preparations say that any aircraft to be assigned need to have enough remaining useful flight hours to cover a six-month deployment at combat rates. In the case of

the A-10, each aircraft needs to have at least 1,200 remaining hours before any scheduled major maintenance action like a wing replacement or structural overhaul to be eligible for an overseas deployment. The briefing shows that 145 A-10s now are non-deployable.

The briefing also includes a blatant falsehood. Lee claims that there has been a “perpetuated 10-year drought” of A-10 modernizations. That is not true. The Air National Guard and Reserves has a small modernization budget, and some of that money has been put to good use in the A-10 fleet. Since 2012, this money has been spent to add a Helmet Mounted Integrated Targeting System, Jam Resistant GPS, and a 3D Audio System, all of which is at least as good as the systems in newer aircraft. The Jam Resis-

tant GPS is better than any similar system in the Air Force today.

This funding has also been used to integrate new weapons. Recent press reports show the A-10 flying in a “bomb truck” configuration carrying multiple Small Diameter Bombs. Those upgrades only happened because the National Guard took the lead and funded their development.

THE REAL VALUE OF THE A-10

The A-10 can’t fly forever. No serious person would suggest otherwise. Preserving the A-10 now is a stopgap measure until a new dedi-

cated close air support aircraft can be fielded. So far, Air Force leaders have demonstrated little interest in such a program, unfortunately. They are far more interested in continuing to spend untold billions buying highly complex aircraft they claim can fly deep over enemy territory to strike targets far behind the front lines in

sion in the years before the major wars of the 20th century. When the United States entered three of those wars — World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam — the Air Force lacked a capable close air support force. It was only through wartime improvisation that such forces were created as each war progressed, and only after

American military will quickly find itself without an effective close air support capability and future soldiers and Marines will suffer accordingly the next time we go to war. Air Force leaders are fond of saying that close air support is “a mission, not a platform.” This is true, but the mission can only be performed by people who have trained extensively for it. As history shows, Air Force leaders are loath to devote the time and resources necessary to adequately train for a mission that doesn’t benefit them.

Saving the A-10 now is as much about saving the mission as it is about saving the platform. It’s the culture of the A-10 pilots that needs to be preserved. If Congress fails to hold Air Force leaders accountable now by intervening, to not just prevent the fleet from being retired but also ensure it receives the resources necessary to rehabilitate it, the attack pilot culture that grew up around the aircraft will vanish quickly and young Americans fighting in a future war will die because they won’t have the air support they need and deserve. ■

If Air Force leaders are allowed to continue defying Congress and deliberately sabotaging the A-10 fleet, the American military will quickly find itself without an effective close air support capability.

their false assertions that doing so alone can win wars. More than 100 years of military history puts the lie to those claims, yet even today prominent airpower advocates continue to make their ridiculous claims that airpower can win wars without ground troops.

Success in combat requires the full integration of all arms. A-10 pilots understand this better than most people serving in uniform today. Three generations of A-10 pilots have dealt with the abuse heaped upon them from their own leaders because they understood only too well how much their mission mattered to the soldiers and Marines on the ground. That’s why preserving the A-10 fleet matters now: The aircraft can be replaced, but the institutional knowledge and the attack pilot’s culture of dedication to true combined arms would take a generation to re-create.

The leading flyers of their day in both the Air Force and its precursor institutions dismissed and outright ignored the close air support mis-

many troops on the ground died needlessly. In the case of Korea, the newly liberated Air Force never did manage to provide effective close air support and essentially ceded the mission to Navy flyers.

In its own way, that was an impressive feat for the Air Force because its World War II predecessor organization had excellent tactical aviation units that worked well with the American armies by the time U.S. forces were storming across northern Europe.

The lone exception to this pattern was the 1991 Gulf War. Even though the Air Force was well into the process of retiring the A-10 fleet as Saddam Hussein’s forces crossed the border into Kuwait in August 1990, a sizable force remained and was pressed into service for the conflict that ensued. That war was America’s first in which the military possessed an effective close air support force on the first day.

If Air Force leaders are allowed to continue defying Congress and deliberately sabotaging the A-10 fleet, the

This piece was first published in April 2022. The original and its sources can be found at pogo.org/leaders-defy-congress

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FIND OUT MORE

Read the next story to see how the Air Force responded after we published this article. ►



Air Force Leaders Threatened by Relevant, Factual A-10 Information

BY DAN GRAZIER

Air Force leaders are concerned that members of Congress and the public reading information not cleared by them will thwart their efforts to buy new aircraft and retire the programs they don't want. To control the narrative, members of the Air Force are being warned not to release information that could complicate the official messaging.

The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) obtained a copy of a May 18, 2022, email sent to all hands in the 53rd Wing by the wing's operational security officer that warned recipients against unauthorized leaks. The email included a message attributed to General Charles "CQ" Brown, Jr. The message says, "an internal brief

about the sustainment of the A-10 was leaked to the public, which makes it more difficult for [the secretary of the Air Force] and [Air Force chief of staff] to message Congress on modernization. We are our own worst enemy when we don't practice good [operational security]."

The brief referenced was a PowerPoint presentation from March 2022, also obtained by POGO, that detailed the Air Force's A-10 divestiture plans. That brief showed how Air Force leaders sabotaged the A-10 fleet by refusing to fund needed upgrades including new wings and an improved computer. They also stripped maintenance resources, creating a significant backlog of repair work. The unclassified briefing showed how Air Force leaders have worked to destroy the fleet through neglect to better make the

case that the A-10 should be retired.

This latest attempt to control the narrative surrounding the A-10 is reminiscent of an earlier episode where an Air Force general declared that anyone speaking to Congress about the program in a way counter to the official message was committing "treason." According to the Air Force's internal investigation report, Major General James Post was asked a question about the future of the A-10 fleet during a conference attended by about 350 Air Force officers on January 10, 2015. Post responded in part by saying, "If anyone accuses me of saying this, I will deny it ... anyone who is passing information to Congress about A-10 capabilities is committing treason."

Post's comments prompted an immediate response from both the

inspector general and Capitol Hill. The late Senator John McCain (R-AZ) called on the Air Force to launch an investigation. Post was relieved of his duties soon after and forced into early retirement.

Congress should pay close attention to this incident as well. When the Air Force chief of staff's message hinges on a tightly controlled narrative with absolutely no contradictory information allowed, the case being made should be questioned all the more.

The Air Force's plans to retire the A-10 without an adequate replace-

Congress needs to hold Air Force leaders accountable. Members should reject the Air Force's A-10 retirement plans and make sure the fleet receives the resources necessary to rehabilitate it. Additionally, Congress should demand a briefing from the Air Force about its plans to replace the capability of the A-10. The best outcome would be a replacement aircraft, which should be based on the original requirements for the A-10 and integrate modern combat systems. A-10 pilots have been thinking about the design characteristics of a 21st century attack air-

quickly come a day when young Americans fighting on a distant battlefield will die because the air support they need is absent from the skies above. ■

Following the initial publication of this report, Brown's public affairs advisor sent an email to the author stating that the message was a reminder for all members to follow appropriate operational security procedures. The email went on to say that, "the subsequent lines referencing an internal brief were not written by him, nor do they reflect any public statement he has made to date (nor would he have referred to himself in the third person as 'CSAF,' as it appears in both the email and article)."

This report has been updated to remove the direct attribution to Brown.

Congress needs to hold Air Force leaders accountable. Members should reject the Air Force's A-10 retirement plans and make sure the fleet receives the resources necessary to rehabilitate it.

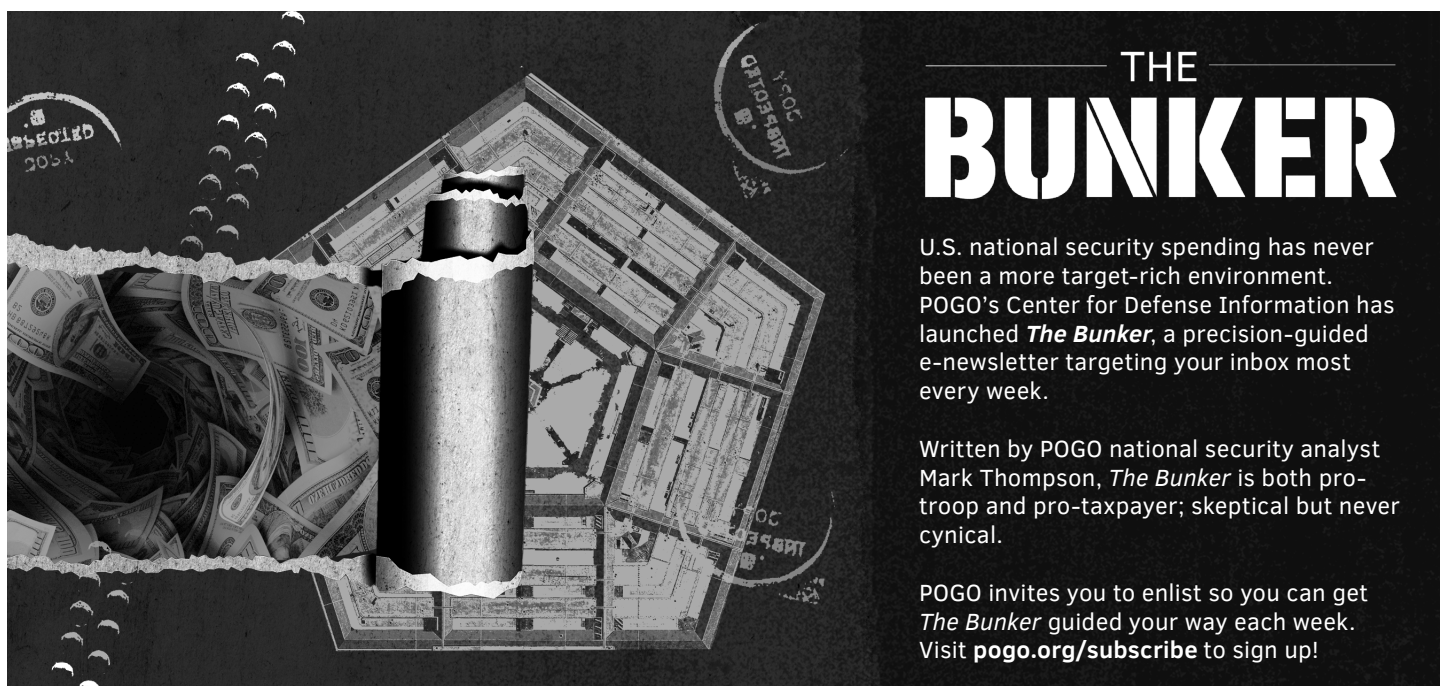
ment will create a significant capability gap. Troops on the ground will not have the support they need without an effective attack aircraft program and, even more importantly, a cadre of specialized pilots dedicated to the mission.

craft for years, so engineers would not have to start from scratch.

If Congress fails to act and allows Air Force leaders to follow through with their secretive plans to scrap the A-10 without replacing it, there will

This piece was first published in June 2022. The original and its sources can be found at pogo.org/threatened-by-information

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THE BUNKER

U.S Arms for Ukraine – Supply Line or Tripwire?

BY MARK THOMPSON

Here's a preview of what you'll get if you subscribe to our weekly newsletter, The Bunker. This newsletter was first published April 20.

FROM SUPPLY LNE TO TRIPWIRE?

U.S. aid could trigger a wider war

Logistics wins wars. A non-stop flow of everything from bullets to howitzers is a key to prevailing on the battlefield. As Ukraine continues to surprise the world with its bloody showdown with Russia, it has become increasingly clear that U.S.-provided gear is the oxygen fueling Kyiv's fight. Russia, at long last, has figured this out, too, and warned — get this — of “unpredictable consequences” if the U.S. doesn't shut off its weapons spigot.

Instead, the U.S. and its allies are cranking it open even more. Russia's reaction to its unprovoked invasion is like that of a schoolyard bully, just like its threat to move its nuclear weapons closer to Finland and Sweden if they decide to join NATO. Those of *The Bunker's* age, who recall U.S. frustration with the Vietnam war's Ho Chi Minh trail that kept Viet Cong kitted out for conflict, can only wryly smile now that the combat boot is on the other foot.

It's a near-perfect war from the perspective of the U.S. military-industrial complex: no U.S. troops at risk, but the prospect of U.S. defense

contractor profits as the Pentagon nervously eyes the arms depots being drained as the U.S. ships billions of dollars in weapons to Ukraine. Cynical, but true.

After two months of war, the U.S. military is running a far smoother trans-Atlantic logistics pipeline into Ukraine than the next-door Russians have been able to mount (Exhibit A being Moscow's 40-mile supply convoy mired early in the conflict). Virtually all of the \$2.6 billion in U.S. weapons shipped to Ukraine since the February 24 invasion have come from the Pentagon's own depots (there have been only two Pentagon-Ukraine contracts: an April 12 Puma spy drone deal for \$20 million, and a February 28 Javelin anti-tank missile contract for \$20 million split among Ukraine and 14 other nations).

The U.S. has tapped into its own arsenals seven times since August to ship weapons to Ukraine, something a U.S. president can do unilaterally when facing an “unforeseen emergency.” They include 1,400 Stinger aircraft-killing missiles; 5,500 Javelin anti-tank missiles; 700 Switchblade kamikaze drones; 7,000 small arms; 50,000,000 rounds of ammunition (roughly 300 slugs per Red Army soldier inside Ukraine); 18 155mm howitzers with 40,000 rounds; 16 Mi-17

helicopters; 200 M113 Armored Personnel Carriers; and hundreds of armored Humvees.

Ukraine has made no secret that it wants bigger, badder weapons to battle the Russians, including fighter jets and tanks. Retired Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, who commanded U.S. Army forces in Europe from 2014 to 2018, fears the U.S. and its allies are playing for a tie. “This is about us being the arsenal of democracy,” he told CBS's *Face the Nation* April 17. “I would really like to hear the administration talk about winning and having a sense of urgency on getting these things there.” Moscow issued a *démarche* — basically, a curt diplomatic message declaring how dare you! — April 12 saying the U.S. and its allies are shredding “rigorous principles” governing arms flows during wartime, and ignoring “the threat of high-precision weapons falling into the hands of radical nationalists, extremists and bandit forces in forces in Ukraine.”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *The Bunker* is a precision-guided e-newsletter by Pulitzer prize-winning National Security Analyst Mark Thompson for the Center for Defense Information at POGO.

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Future F-35 Upgrades Send Program into Tailspin

BY DAN GRAZIER

Pentagon watchers were caught off guard when the president released his budget and it showed the services would be asking Congress for far fewer F-35s in 2023 than everyone expected. The services had been expected to request 94 new F-35s in their budget proposal, but the total request ended up being 61, a 35% production cut. The official explanation is that the program's development delays have caused the F-35 to not have the capabilities the services need, and that leaders aren't interested in buying more units of an aircraft that would later require upgrades at great expense.

That the F-35 went into production in the numbers seen so far is already a

violation of federal law, even if only in spirit. The provisions allowing for limited production of a weapon system before development work is completed are a safeguard meant to protect both the troops and the taxpayers. Per federal law, the F-35 program can only produce a limited number of aircraft before it completes operational testing and is formally approved for full rate production. Were the services to request and receive the expected number of F-35s in 2023, the program would have exceeded the low rate initial production cap.

Of all the troubling aspects of the F-35 program, and there are many, the Pentagon's insistence on producing aircraft before finishing the design is the one thing that would obviously drive up costs the most — and it did. As POGO has been pointing out

for years, if any aircraft purchased before the program's design is completed and tested are ever to be used as intended, they will have to undergo a costly retrofitting process once all the design flaws are identified and corrected. Pentagon leaders appear to have belatedly come to the realization that they will not be able to afford future F-35 upgrades if they continue purchasing new but untested aircraft, flouting the safeguards designed to ensure that only effective programs go into production.

THE COST OF RETROFITTING UNDERDEVELOPED AIRCRAFT

Bloomberg first reported on March 16 that the Biden administration would be requesting 61 F-35s instead of 94 as part of the fiscal year 2023 budget. The Department of Defense confirmed

that report when it released the official fiscal year 2023 budget request on March 28. Vice Admiral Ronald Boxall, the director of force structure on the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs of Staff, cited delays on the F-35's Block 4 "modernization" effort as the reason for the production cut.

The Department of Defense comptroller's just-released fiscal year 2023 *Program Acquisition Cost by Weapon System* report actually shows that the services expected to buy 96 F-35s in the coming year. Either figure would have been an approximately 10% increase from the 85 purchased in the 2022 budget. At a time when most people believed the F-35 program would ramp up production in advance of the long-anticipated full rate production decision, a 35% or 36% reduction from the expected order represents a significant policy reversal.

Pentagon's top acquisition post and is now secretary of the Air Force.

The Government Accountability Office reported in 2020 that the concurrency costs for the F-35 program were then estimated to be \$1.4 billion. At the time, approximately 550 F-35s had been purchased, which means that the estimated cost to upgrade each aircraft is \$2.5 million. More than 200 F-35s have been produced since that report, and the resulting concurrency costs are now nearing \$2 billion, based on the most recent estimated cost figures provided by the Pentagon.

Cutting the planned F-35 production numbers by 33 just from a single year's buy could potentially save \$84 million because of upgrades that will not be needed. While that number may seem small in Washington terms, it does add up over time. The GAO reports it will take at least another

make up the difference during either the authorization or appropriations process, the services could save more than \$400 million.

When viewed in the larger context of all F-35 costs, the decision to cut production becomes even easier to understand. The Block 4 development costs are just one problem. Following a report that put the annual operations cost of each F-35 at \$7.8 million, members of Congress floated a proposal to cut the size of the fleet to keep the overall costs down in the long run. Of course, the cost of the entire program has long been a significant issue. When the Pentagon announced the beginning of the F-35 program in 2001, the cost to develop and purchase the entire fleet stood at \$200 billion. That figure doubled to approximately \$400 billion by 2019 and continues to rise. The current best estimate for the total cost to operate the fleet stands at \$1.3 trillion.

"Putting the F-35 into production years before the first test flight was acquisition malpractice. It should not have been done. But we did it."

— FRANK KENDALL, SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

The reduced F-35 purchase is good news for everyone concerned about out-of-control government spending. Retrofitting design upgrades into existing aircraft is an expensive process. In Pentagon parlance, expenses along these lines are called concurrency costs.

"Putting the F-35 into production years before the first test flight was acquisition malpractice. It should not have been done. But we did it," said Frank Kendall in 2012. At the time, Kendall was the acting head of the

five years for engineers to complete the Block 4 development work and cautioned that the estimate is optimistic. The modernization effort has been plagued with delays and resulting cost overruns. This part of the F-35 program alone is already at least three years behind schedule, and the current estimated \$14.4 billion cost is more than \$4 billion over the original estimate. If the Pentagon manages to restrain itself from increasing F-35 purchases until the design is complete, and Congress doesn't

LEGAL SAFEGUARDS LIMITING PREMATURE PRODUCTION

An issue not mentioned in any of the announcements and apparently otherwise overlooked is that the repeatedly delayed full rate production decision has backed the program into a legal corner because the services are rapidly approaching the maximum number of aircraft they can purchase during low rate initial production.

Low rate initial production of weapons is allowed by law with some stipulations. The law's authors wanted to make sure the services weren't purchasing significant numbers of underdeveloped weapons before the design was finished and fully tested. Low rate initial production is meant to provide enough units to conduct testing, build a manufacturing base,

and provide the means for an efficient increase to full rate production. Federal law is notably silent on producing aircraft or any other weapons to be used in combat before the design is fully tested and formally approved for production.

The law generally limits weapon programs to 10% of the total planned production during the development phase, although it also allows the secretary of defense to specify an amount larger than 10% when the development contract is awarded. The justification for the larger initial production run must be included in the program's selected acquisition report. The F-35 program has an authorized low rate initial production quantity of 518, 21% of the 2,456 F-35s to be produced for the United States. The secretary of defense provided a somewhat confusing justification, saying the increase is "due to the necessity to prevent a break in production and to ramp up to [Full Rate Production]." The number of aircraft delivered to the U.S. services so far is at least 454, although that number increases constantly. The production of even the 61 F-35s requested for 2023 will put the total close to the authorized low rate initial production quantity, and that doesn't account for the rest of the aircraft that will be delivered in the remaining months of the current budget year.

CONGRESSIONAL DISCIPLINE NEEDED

Some members of Congress, particularly those with a political stake in the program, are responding to the proposed smaller F-35 buy exactly as expected. Some members of Congress are circulating a letter around Capitol Hill urging their colleagues to increase F-35 production, citing

the Russian invasion of Ukraine and industrial base concerns as justification. The letter is curiously silent on the actual reasons why the request is smaller this time around.

The effort to boost F-35 production on Capitol Hill is being led by the co-chairs of the Congressional Joint Strike Fighter Caucus, Representatives Marc Veasey (D-TX), Mike Turner (R-OH), John Larson (D-CT), and Chris Stewart (R-UT). Veasey represents the Fort Worth area where Lockheed Martin has its F-35 final assembly plant. Turner represents Dayton, Ohio, and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, home of the F-35 Hybrid Product Support Integrator Organization, which will "integrate support across the supply chain, maintenance, sustainment engineering, logistics information technology and training disciplines" according to an Air Force press release. Larson's district encompasses parts of Middletown, where Pratt & Whitney manufactures the F135 engine. Stewart's district is close to Hill Air Force Base, where 78 F-35s are based; it is also home to the Air Force's 309th Air Force Maintenance Group, which provides depot-level maintenance for the entire Air Force fleet of F-35s.

Members of Congress eager to add aircraft to the buy received some ammunition to aid their efforts: The services are already circulating their unfunded priorities lists indicating they are not getting all the aircraft they wanted in the president's proposed budget. Air Force leaders included seven F-35As in their list, the Marine Corps wants three additional F-35Bs and three additional F-35Cs. The Navy is asking for six F-35Cs. These 19 F-35s being requested as unfunded priorities would make up more than

half of the number cut from the president's budget. Their inclusion creates a significant contradiction coming from the Pentagon. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley testified before the House Armed Services Committee last week that the F-35 doesn't yet have the capabilities the services need.

CONCLUSION

All of the problems now coming to a head with the F-35 program should not be a surprise to anyone, even though many seem to be caught off guard. Purchasing large numbers of aircraft before the design work is completed will add to unnecessary costs. This should be common sense, but apparently the power brokers in the military-industrial-congressional complex need to learn these lessons the hard way. Perhaps the decision-makers 20 years ago believed they could bend reality to their will. Perhaps they figured they could say whatever they needed to in order to get the program started, knowing they would be long-retired before the consequences of their disastrous plans would manifest. Whatever the case, it is the American people and the service members today and in the foreseeable future who are left to deal with those consequences. ■

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pogo.org/f-35-tailspin*

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INSIDE



EFFECTIVENESS

1

DAN GRAZIER

**AIR FORCE LEADERS
DEFY CONGRESS'S A-10
MANDATES**

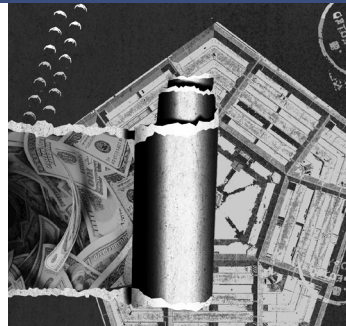


TRANSPARENCY

5

DAN GRAZIER

**AIR FORCE LEADERS
THREATENED BY
RELEVANT, FACTUAL A-10
INFORMATION**



EFFECTIVENESS

7

MARK THOMPSON

**THE BUNKER:
U.S. Arms for Ukraine –
Supply Line or Tripwire?**



WASTE

9

DAN GRAZIER

**FUTURE F-35 UPGRADES
SEND PROGRAM INTO
TAILSPIN**